



**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
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**REPRESENTATIVE ELISSA T. WRIGHT**  
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**VICE CHAIRMAN**  
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FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE  
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE ELISSA WRIGHT**  
**STATE REPRESENTATIVE, 41<sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT**

*Planning and Development Committee Public Hearing*  
*March 2, 2009*

**In Support of:**

H.B. No. 6463, An Act Concerning Membership on Regional Planning Agencies  
H.B. No. 6464, An Act Concerning Coordinated Preservation and Development  
H.B. No. 6465, An Act Concerning Smart Growth and Transportation Planning  
H.B. No. 6466, An Act Concerning Projects of Regional Significance  
H.B. No. 6467, An Act Concerning Smart Growth and Plans of Conservation and Development  
H.B. No. 6469, An Act Concerning Smart Growth and State Planning  
H.B. No. 6585, An Act Concerning Regionalism  
H.B. No. 6588, An Act Concerning Training for Local Land Use Commissioners  
S.B. No. 371, An Act Concerning Intermunicipal Cooperation  
S.B. No. 374, An Act Promoting Regionalism in the State  
H.B. No. 5544, An Act Concerning Regional Economic Development Plans

Senator Coleman, Representative Sharkey and members of the Planning and Development Committee:

Concerns about global warming, dependence on foreign sources of energy, diminution of farmland and open spaces, and inefficient use of resources associated with urban sprawl are triggering renewed interest in smart growth.

During the past year, the Smart Growth Working Group evaluated how application of comprehensive smart growth principles statewide could improve public policies pertaining to land consumption, environmental protection, transportation, housing, energy, property taxation and how their application will promote sustainable and balanced development as a fundamental goal.

The above-referenced bills comprise a series of public policy instruments designed to help guide Connecticut toward smarter growth patterns that are more economically efficient, environmentally friendly, and socially desirable. Many of the bills come from Smart Growth Working Group recommendations presented in December. I was pleased to serve as tri-chair of the Tax Policy Sub-Group, one of four Smart Growth Working Group subcommittees.

The fundamental approach in this suite of bills addresses several broad areas of concern:

- Generate information from which to institute policies and practices that will enable Connecticut to promote and encourage more efficient use of land and infrastructure and guide future decisions in state and local tax policy through a better understanding of the impacts of externalities that arise from certain types of land uses. To this end, conduct a tax incidence study, statewide build-out analysis, and statewide GIS mapping. **H.B. 6469.**
- Clearly articulate a coordinated, integrated statewide approach for planning major land use and conservation initiatives consistent with smart growth (newly defined in **H.B. 6467**), to promote better land use planning that protects environmental assets and makes most efficient use of infrastructure. To this end, legislation would embed smart growth principles in state transportation, brownfield remediation, open space, farmland and historic asset grant decisions; promote planning consistency through vertical integration of smart growth principles in state, local and regional plans of conservation and development; and enhance training for local land use officials. **H.B. 6467; H.B. 6588; H.B. 6467; H.B. 6464; H.B. 6465.**
- Smart growth recognizes that taxes affect land use. In Connecticut's spatially fragmented system of 169 local governments, heavy property tax reliance pits community against community in competition for new business development to enhance grand list growth, resulting in inefficient allocation of public resources, loss of farmland and open spaces, and fiscal disparities. Proposed regional asset, tax base and/or revenue<sup>1</sup> sharing options are designed to reduce inter-municipal competition for major economic development projects of regional significance and the need for costly public infrastructure development to support such facilities. Minnesota's regional property tax-base sharing program is a successful model for spreading the fiscal benefit of new business development within a region, reducing disparities in property tax wealth among towns and keeping property tax rates in check without diminishing local control over tax rates and expenditure levels. The legislative package provides for other regional cooperation and coordination initiatives to make government more efficient and less expensive through better distribution of resources in the built environment. They include: encouraging more socially and environmentally responsible land use planning; investing in transportation options that reduce vehicle miles traveled; and improving stewardship of natural resources through a more systems-wide approach to preserve Connecticut's natural and cultural assets for the enjoyment of future generations. Increased regional responsibility requires increased accountability and assurances of transparency in regional planning, tax-base and revenue-sharing decision-making. **H.B. 6466; H.B. 6585; H.B. 5544; H.B. 6463; S.B. 371; S.B. 374.**

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<sup>1</sup> I have reservations concerning the taxing authority of regions to levy regional taxes proposed in Section 1(b)(3) of S.B. 371, **An Act Concerning Intermunicipal Cooperation.**

In conclusion, with fiscal costs spiraling and economic effects reverberating throughout the state, let us seize the moment and fashion a new enlightened approach to growth; one that strengthens our cities, protects our natural resources, expands economic opportunities, and improves the state's competitive position.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters.